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Protecting their land

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PROTECTING THEIR LAND

IOWANS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS HAVE UNITED TO PROTEST A NEW OIL PIPELINE

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Environmentalists, the Sioux tribe, and rural farmers.

Three groups that may not always have a lot in common have been coming together to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline, also known as the Bakken Pipeline.

The Dakota Access Pipeline begins in northwestern North Dakota, runs 1,172 miles across South Dakota and Iowa, and ends in southern Illinois. The underground pipeline was announced in June 2014 and will be transporting crude Bakken oil across many rivers and lakes, under farmland, near Sioux tribal land and about six miles west and south of Ames, Iowa. People have been opposed to the construction of the pipeline for environmental reasons, a concern that it is disrespecting treaties with the Sioux, as well as the eminent domain issue and disturbance of farmland.

Others say the pipeline is a good thing that brings jobs across the Midwest, helps give the U.S. oil independence and frees up railroads for farmers to ship produce. Supporters of the pipeline have said it is in the nation's interest for it to be built.

However, the resistance in central Iowa has been strong. With the pipeline passing between Ames and Boone, some are

worried about the effect it could have on the community's farmland and water. There have been many protests, rallies and gatherings in opposition around central Iowa. Sunday, February 12, pipeline opponents gathered at the Ames Public Library to sign a petition, eat pizza and pie, and write postcards to government officials urging them to stop the pipeline. Children, Iowa State University students and other residents from the area wrote their messages for different reasons but all for a common goal.

Zoey Mauck, senior in landscape architecture, voiced her concern for environmental impacts due to a potential future pipeline burst.

"The amount of things that could happen throughout the nation, it's scary to think about," says Mauck.

Environmentalists and farmers are concerned about the pipeline's effect on the Midwest for similar reasons. Boone County resident April Burch has been trying to get her fellow central Iowa residents to see the potential damage for over a year and show them how these groups can come together.

"The catastrophic pollution that could result from a 2-3 million gallon spill

anywhere in the Des Moines River or even the Mississippi River Watersheds could destroy some of the richest remaining farmland in the world and contaminate our ground and/or surface water for decades to come," Burch says. It is estimated that the pipeline will transport around a half a million gallons of crude oil per day.

Burch says her passion and opposition to this pipeline comes from being born and raised in the area and a concern for her children's future.

"I've spent most of my life drinking water from the Des Moines River and I'm grateful for her gifts to us. That river made my bones and my flesh and has given me everything I needed to survive. It is appalling to me that our people would allow an assault of this nature and potential devastation to come to the very source of our lives," says Burch.

Iowa State student and senior in environmental science Megan Koppenhafer says she is mostly opposed for environmental reasons, as well as the Sioux tribe potentially being affected.

"I support their right to say no to this. They don't deserve to bear the brunt of the environmental consequences of this pipeline," Koppenhafer says.



“THIS IS SETTING A PRECEDENT BECAUSE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THIS TYPE OF PIPELINE HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO GO THROUGH IOWA, NOW THAT PRECEDENT WILL AFFECT EVERYTHING ELSE.”





A large reason the Sioux and supporters of their tribe are fighting the pipeline is because of a treaty made in 1851 reserving land for the Sioux tribe in the Standing Rock reservation. However, there is controversy over this because some argue that the pipeline is about half a mile north of Sioux land and does not actually run through it.

"I was always against it from the beginning because of the environmental impact and eminent domain abuse that happened here in Iowa," says Lisa Lai, a member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI). She says what really pushed her to get involved were the protests and activism that happened in Standing Rock. Lai has visited Standing Rock twice and was displeased with the way the protests were suppressed. During her first visit, pepper spray and attack dogs were used to ward off protesters. At the time of her second visit a mass arrest occurred at the protest site.

The Sioux are also concerned about the potential polluting of the Missouri River if a spill occurred, and that the route is under Lake Oahe in North Dakota. Construction was temporarily halted in December due to protests and the need for an environmental impact survey conducted by the Army

Corps of Engineers. On February 8, 2017, the Corps approved the construction of the remaining portion of the pipeline.

Others are concerned about the impact of rural communities in general, not just Standing Rock. The pipeline's route was originally planned to go near Bismark, North Dakota, but was rerouted when the Army Corps of Engineers said it was too close to the city's water supply. However, the route is now going near many other smaller community's water sources. Brenda Brink, member of CCI, is concerned with how little many people know about the pipeline, even though it may be going right past their home or through their drinking water.

"They didn't take into account anything related to rural communities," said Brink, "They did the very minimum, minimum, minimum evaluation that they could environmentally, and they got away with it. But it's not right."

Rural communities include farmers and their families as well. The pipeline goes through farmland in Boone, where there are semi trailers set up with the message "stop eminent domain abuse." The company has been allowed to sequester private property for the pipeline to pass

through over 1,000 landowners' property in Iowa. While some have voluntarily let the company run the pipeline through their land, others have protested their private property being taken and used for this.

Oil is scheduled to begin flowing through the Dakota Access Pipeline during the spring of 2017, but opponents are still protesting and threatening lawsuits against the company which has caused uncertainty of when exactly that oil will flow. Concerns about water safety, environmental impacts, and the effects on future generations are still high.

"I have five children who I pray have the ability to build a life here too if they choose. I speak out for them and their futures," says Burch.

Although construction of the pipeline near Ames is complete, some Iowans are still fighting and fear what the Dakota Access Pipeline means for the future.

"This is setting a precedent because this is the first time this type of pipeline has been allowed to go through Iowa, now that precedent will affect everything else," Brink says. 